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ABSTRACT

The major underlying concepts used in developing this Collaborative Teaching Program for intermediate grade level students included the heterogeneous grouping of pupils in a community of learners, the use of quality circle management, and the appropriate use of teaching strategies geared toward the major modes of learning. The community of learners concept developed for the project involved three communities of approximately 120 pupils. The average age range in each community is approximately 3 years. Four regular teachers in each community, plus a full complement of special teachers, working together as an interdisciplinary team, plan and provide instruction to meet the learning needs of the students in their respective communities. This paper describes the types of instruction used in the program and how the concept of quality circle management contributes to the effectiveness of the program. (JD)

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Planning and Administering a Collaborative Teaching Program
(PACT)

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Planning and Administering a Collaborative Teaching Program (PACT)

America's educational system has undergone a thorough examination by a host of national authorities and a number of groups and committees in recent years. The bottom line, after all reports have been analyzed, is that our schools are not getting the job done and changes must be made if our nation is to continue as a world leader.

When planning major changes in school programs, we must remember why so many of our previous efforts fell short of expected outcomes. For example, the following postulates have been repeatedly confirmed:

1. Effective and lasting changes in the schooling process must be planned and developed at the individual school level.
2. All of the individual elements of the school program are interrelated. Therefore, changes must take into account the total program. All parts of the program — management, curriculum, content and organization, instructional grouping schemes employed, and the teaching methods used must be in harmony with one another.
3. Those who are expected to implement curricula change must be involved with the planning and development phases of the project.
4. Administrative leadership is essential. Needs such as time, fiscal resources, and moral support must be provided.

In our search for direction in developing a harmonious program designed to improve the mind, body, and spirit of each child, we borrowed ideas from the writings of noted authorities such as John Goodlad, Robert Anderson, Mortimer Adler, and the predictions of John Naisbitt. The major underlying concepts which we used in developing this innovative and holistic program for intermediate grade level

pupils included the heterogenous grouping of pupils in a community of learners, the use of quality circle or Theory Z management, and the appropriate use of teaching strategies geared toward the major modes of learning.

Community of Learners

The traditional age-grade vertical curricula organizational scheme has outlived its usefulness. This conclusion has been shared by authorities on teaching and learning for years, but none have put forth an organizational plan with greater promise than the community of learners concept advocated by John Goodlad (1984).

Goodlad feels that we are at the end of an era where bigger was thought to be better, and that it is time to organize units of schooling that are more manageable as well as productive. The individual school, according to Goodlad, should be comprised of a number of sub units or communities. The community of learners concept developed for this project involved three communities of approximately 120 pupils. The average age range in each community is approximately three years (see figure A). Four regular teachers in each community plus a full

Insert Figure A About Here

complement of special teachers, working together as an interdisciplinary team, plan and provide instruction to meet the learning needs of the pupils in their respective communities.

Views toward instructional grouping on the basis of pupil achievement and/or diagnosed needs have continually changed over the years. The teachers who have participated in the development of this model feel that it is necessary to group pupils for instruction in math and language skills, but that the grouping should always be for relatively short periods of time and based on the specific needs of the learners. The instructional sequence in the skill subjects, especially for the 9, 10, and 11 year old pupils follows the steps shown below:

1. A review/overview of the skills and concepts to be covered in this particular instructional sequence, which normally lasts from 3 to 5 weeks, is presented to all pupils in the community.
2. Learners are then pretested on their understanding of the skills and concepts by using pencil-paper tests and by oral questioning in a guided instructional setting.
3. The instructional team, using the preassessment data, assigns each child to one of three major instructional groups.
4. The major lessons, taught in 40 minute sessions using didactic instructional techniques, are presented on a conceptual level appropriate for that particular group. Although there is similarity and overlap between the lessons for the three groups, the examples, illustrations, etc., may vary considerably.
5. Following the 40 minute lesson in the didactic instructional setting, the 38 to 40 pupils go to one of three teachers for a follow-up lesson which is also approximately 40 minutes in length. During

this small group session, the teacher has time to probe each child's understanding, to clarify misunderstandings, and to extend the child's thinking. Appropriate practice and/or extension activities are prescribed by the teacher to fit the individual needs of the children. The mode of instruction employed by the teachers is a combination of questioning and discussion.

6. Independent practice or investigation is the last step in the instructional sequence of a particular lesson. Again, this time period is normally 40 minutes. Often the children work in groups of four during independent practice where they help and are helped by their peers. Other self checking schemes are often used because of the importance of immediate feedback. Usually there is a teacher nearby that can provide help and direction when needed. Parent volunteers and tutors also play a very important role by helping the pupils during the independent practice session.

7. The three phase lessons continue throughout the unit and culminate in an assessment process involving large group testing, small group oral questioning, and re-teaching when and where necessary. The pupil's achievement and placement in the unit just completed does not necessarily affect his/her group placement in the next 3 to 5 week instructional sequence. This placement is based on the child's preassessment data that is related specifically to the unit to be studied and the opinion of the teachers.

All pupils in the community, regardless of age, grade status, achievement level, or exceptionality, move through the three phase

instructional sequence. The instructional team shares the belief that pull-out programs and alternative curriculums should be avoided. The earlier pull-out programs which were used as a means for providing special help created planning nightmares for teachers and gaps in the pupil's learning. Alternatives, such as having the special education teachers go into the child's regular classroom and give special help, were also plagued with scheduling and coordinating problems.

In our search for a better way to deliver special education services, several ideas were borrowed from the parallel block scheduling scheme described by Canady and Hotchkiss (1985). A decision was made for the special education teachers to work with their pupils during the guided instruction session and/or during the independent practice time. A block of time was also set aside on Fridays for extended activities, field trips, and other projects. The special Friday activities have become a very important part of the school program.

Instruction Based on Modes of Learning

The quality of learning depends largely on the overall quality of the teaching and on the way that the teacher aids the pupil. If the learning focus is on acquisition of knowledge, the teacher may use didactic methods such as lecturing, monitoring the pupils work on drills, exercises, tests, use of textbooks, etc. In that part of the learning experience where the emphasis is on the development of intellectual skills, the teacher coaches the pupils and encourages active involvement. When the learning emphasis is on enlarging

understandings, the teacher will ask questions and encourage discussions (Adler, 1984).

Directed or didactic instruction, guided instruction, and individual study are well known instructional practices which have been used by teachers for many years. Although these practices are somewhat common, they are being used in a very uncommon way in this project. Specifically, instructional sequence followed by the students in this program is as follows:

Direct Instruction

One teacher, using didactic instructional methods, teaches a well planned, carefully sequenced lesson to a selected group of 35 to 40 pupils in a 40 minute period of time. The teacher is very business-like and the focus is clear. Although didactic methods are basically teacher-centered, the pupils' questions are discussed and answered. The pupils are treated in a humane, respectful way, but the teacher is careful not to get sidetracked or delayed by details unrelated to the focus of the lesson.

Guided Instruction

The pupils go to one of three teachers for a 40 minute follow-up to the lesson taught by didactic methods. There are usually 12 to 13 pupils in each small group. Therefore, a great deal of teacher-to-pupil interaction is possible. Adler (1982) is among a host of authorities who have recognized the potential learning power of guided instruction. The opportunity to ask questions, to receive feedback, and to interact

with the teacher and/or pupils is maximized in this setting. Because of the small number of pupils and the available time, teachers are able to see into the pupil's mind, and a student cannot camouflage his or her understanding of the main skills or concepts taught in the direct instructional lesson.

Independent Practice

Depending on each pupil's level of understanding as determined by the teacher during the guided instructional session, pupils are assigned independent practice or other learning tasks to pursue during the independent study period. Teachers of the guided sessions are very careful to ensure that each pupil understands what he/she is to do during independent study. Guided practice and other measures are carried out to check the pupil's understanding and to assure that he/she will be able to complete the assigned task with little or no assistance during independent study.

Quality Circle Management

As professionals, teachers seem to prefer working with other teachers as peers and they generally do not favor hierarchical arrangements such as the team approach advocated by Lloyd Trump (1961) over 25 years ago. By employing the quality circle concept for teams and/or collaborative planning and teaching, each teacher is a leader in his/her area of responsibility with a supportive network of other individuals.

Teachers feel that they know a great deal about their particular job, what needs to be done, what will or will not work. In short,

they feel that, if given the opportunity and the means, they can solve their own problems and that they can find a better way to teach. The quality circle management concept facilitates communication and decision making by a network of fellow workers.

Quality circle management is an example of horizontal power where communication and decision making occurs from the bottom-up, from a network of fellow teachers, instead of top down as in the traditional administrative hierarchy (Naisbitt, 1982). The working relationship that develops from this cooperative process serves as a bond that solidifies this interdisciplinary team as they share, help, and are helped by other team members (Anderson, 1987). An example of how the team leader for the social studies/science areas of the curriculum is supported by other team members is shown in figure B.

Insert Figure B About Here

Although the design of the interdisciplinary team emerging from this project was patterned after the quality circle concept, the teachers agreed that the model must take into account certain axioms. For example:

1. Each teacher should be responsible for providing leadership in a given area of curriculum.
2. All teachers should have instructional responsibilities in most all areas of the curriculum.

3. Curricula emphasis, scheduling, and all matters affecting the activities of this community of learners should be decided on by group agreement among the members of this interdisciplinary team

4. Services provided for the exceptional needs of some learners, such as gifted, speech, learning disabled, etc., shall be planned and delivered within the context of this model and not as add-on programs.

Research on the collaborative teaching model will continue and changes will be made as they are needed, seeking better ways to serve our children. The teachers, though readily accepting the necessary changes created by this program, are firm in their commitment to the collaborative effort.

Summary

The search for a better way continues, but for right now this particular curriculum model is working. All of the teachers involved do not wish to go back to the traditional self-contained classroom or departmentalization, nor the grouping practices once used. Movement of the pupils through the curriculum is at a more rapid pace and their achievement on each subsequent unit is steadily improving. In a recent survey of pupils' opinions, 96 percent of the pupils expressed a positive attitude toward all aspects of the program. Parents, as they witness their children's excitement toward their work at school, and their academic growth, are very supportive. The parents readily volunteer to tutor pupils, to serve as resource speakers, to teach mini courses in special areas such as French, arts and crafts, and music.

Citing all of these positive aspects — teacher satisfaction; increased achievement; happy, motivated children; and enthusiastic and involved parents — this model shows great promise.

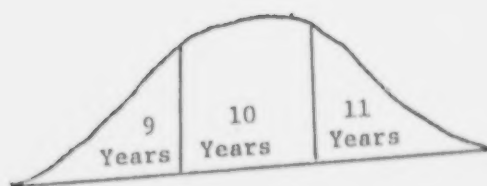


Figure A

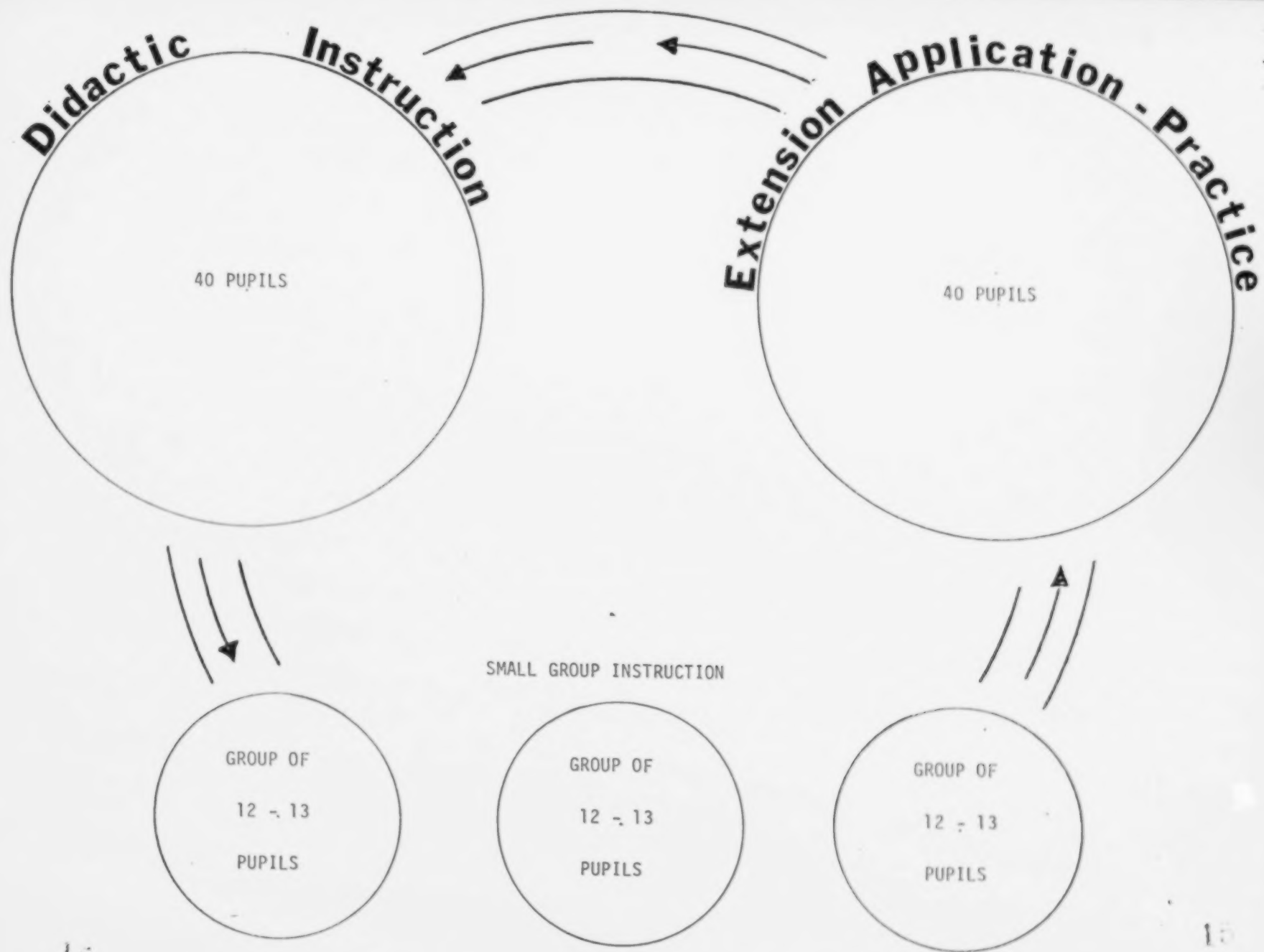


Figure B

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